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Religious Training at Home a Key Factor In Future Church Involvement

PRINCETON, N.J. — A large majority of U.S. adults (82%) have received some sort of religious training as a child regardless of their present church status. This finding comes from a major survey, *The Unchurched American, 1988*, which explored and compared the religious beliefs, practices, values, and lifestyles of the churched and unchurched. The survey, carried out in March, and supported by 24 religious organizations, was conducted for Congress 88, A National Festival of Evangelism.

A similar survey conducted a decade ago showed 83% saying they had received training, statistically the same proportion as found today.

The latest survey shows that most of this religious training takes the form of Sunday School or weekly religious classes (81%) although 28% received instruction at home, and 22% attended a religious or parochial school. About half (54%) received confirmation, or other special training in preparation for full membership in the church or synagogue. Eight in ten (83%) respondents attended church or Sunday School on a regular basis (at least two or three times a month) as a child.

Churched respondents, quite naturally, are significantly more likely than those who are unchurched to have received religious training. However, in absolute terms, the unchurched are generally not lacking in traditional aspects of a religious upbringing. Thus, three in four unchurched respondents indicated that they attended church or Sunday School as a child (73%), and had some form of religious training (75%). *The unchurched, however, are less likely to have received religious training at home (25%) than are those who are now churched (31%).* Other than that, the type of religious training among the two groups are quite similar. Nearly half (45%) of the unchurched have received confirmation training.

Most respondents (86%) endorse the notion of their children receiving some religious training, and in fact, 69% of those with children between the ages of 4 and 18 have children currently receiving such training. The 1978 survey showed the same proportion (87%) as today favoring religious training, *but a lower proportion (60%) saying their children were receiving such training.*

Almost all (96%) churched respondents in the latest survey said they would like a child of theirs to receive religious training, and 83% said they have a child receiving training now. Among the unchurched, significantly fewer said they would want a child of theirs to receive some religious training (73%), and only 48%, in fact, have a child who is presently receiving any.

Churched vs. Unchurched Americans: Definition and Profile

Survey respondents in the 1988 and 1978 surveys were classified as being "churched" if they are a member of a church or synagogue, *and* have attended the house of worship of their choice in the past six months (apart from special religious holidays or occasions such as weddings, funerals, and the like). By this definition, more than half (56%) of those interviewed are "churched." In 1978, when the first "Unchuched American" study was conducted, 59% were classified as being churched according to the same definition.

Traditional Social Values Have Broad Public Appeal

Most Americans cling to traditional social values and would welcome stronger family ties, greater respect for authority, more emphasis on working hard, and less on money. At the same time, demands for greater sexual freedom and tolerance of marijuana use have softened over the last 10 years, especially among young adults.

A new Gallup Poll finds virtually unanimous public support for more emphasis on traditional family ties (94%) and respect for authority (89%). Large majorities also back greater opportunities for self-expression (73%) and a reduced emphasis on money (67%); 70% would welcome more emphasis on working hard.

These conservative social values are as appealing now as they were in 1981 and 1978, when similar majorities said they would welcome more emphasis on each.

Marijuana Acceptance Plummets

During the last 10 years public acceptance of marijuana use has dropped sharply, from 20% in 1978 to 13% in 1981 to only 8% today, reflecting alarm over the drug epidemic. The shifting views of 18-29-year olds have been the underlying force, with the proportion of young adults welcoming greater tolerance of marijuana falling from 43% in 1978 to 28% in 1981 to the present 14%.

Less Demand for Sexual Freedom

The same period has witnessed a gradual decline in overall public demand for greater sexual freedom, from 29% in 1978 to 25% in 1981 to 22% today. Again, the most dramatic shifts in public opinion on this issue have occurred among 18-29-year-olds, although young adults remain far more likely to espouse greater sexual freedom (35%) than 30-49-year-olds (22%) or persons 50 and older (13%).

In 1978 young adults backed greater acceptance of sexual freedom by a 54% to 37% margin. Similar proportions favored (46%) and opposed (44%) this social change in 1981. At present 35% would welcome more sexual freedom while 53% would not.

While many factors may have contributed to this radical change in young people's attitudes toward sexuality, fear of contracting AIDS doubtless has played an important role.

Following are the questions and key findings:

Here are some social changes which might occur in coming years. Would you welcome these or not welcome them? More emphasis on self-expression? Less emphasis on money? More acceptance of sexual freedom? More emphasis on traditional family ties? More respect for authority? Less emphasis on working hard? More acceptance of marijuana usage?

Acceptance of Social Changes

	Welcome	Not welcome	No opinion
	%	%	%
More family ties			
1988	94	3	3
1981	92	5	3
1978	91	5	4
More respect for authority			
1988	89	7	4
1981	89	6	5
1978	89	6	5
More self-expression*			
1988	73	14	13
1978	75	15	10
Less money emphasis			
1988	67	23	10
1981	71	21	8
1978	70	21	9
Less work emphasis			
1988	24	70	6
1981	28	66	6
1978	25	69	6
More sexual freedom			
1988	22	68	10
1981	25	67	8
1978	29	62	9
More marijuana acceptance			
1988	8	87	5
1981	13	82	5
1978	20	74	6

*Not asked in 1981.

The following tables show the trends, by age, for public acceptance of marijuana use and sexual freedom:

More Acceptance of Marijuana

	Welcome %	Not welcome %	No opinion %
18-29 years			
1988	14	79	7
1981	28	64	8
1978	43	47	10
30-49 years			
1988	8	88	4
1981	12	83	5
1978	16	79	5
50 & older			
1988	4	93	3
1981	3	93	4
1978	6	90	4

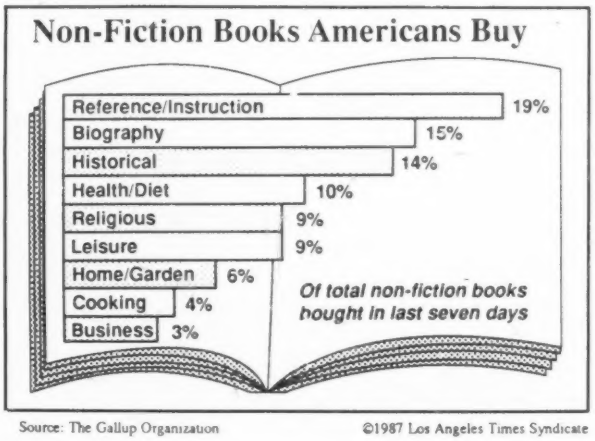
More Acceptance of Sexual Freedom

	Welcome %	Not welcome %	No opinion %
18-29 years			
1988	35	53	12
1981	46	44	10
1978	54	37	9
30-49 years			
1988	22	68	10
1981	24	67	9
1978	28	64	8
50 & older			
1988	13	79	8
1981	10	83	7
1978	11	79	10

The 1988 results are based on in-person interviews with 2,556 adults, 18 and older, conducted in more than 300 scientifically selected localities across the nation March 11-20. For results based on samples of this size, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects could be 2 percentage points in either direction.

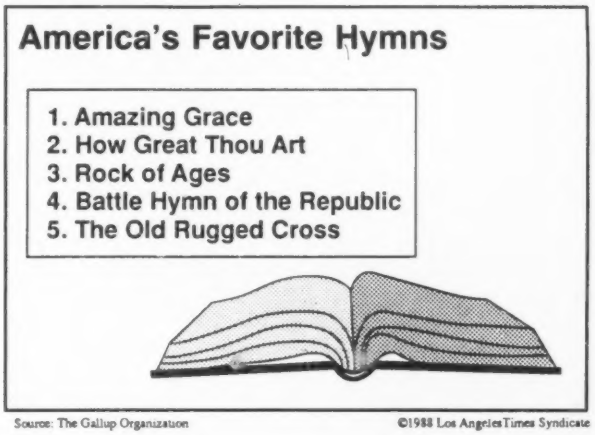
In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls. *This report conforms to the standards of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.*

Gallup Graphics



Source: The Gallup Organization ©1987 Los Angeles Times Syndicate

Gallup Graphics


America's Favorite Hymns
1. Amazing Grace
2. How Great Thou Art
3. Rock of Ages
4. Battle Hymn of the Republic
5. The Old Rugged Cross

Source: The Gallup Organization ©1988 Los Angeles Times Syndicate

Churchgoing Slides in Great Britain

Churchgoing among the British has slipped over the last six years, with 56% in a recent survey saying they never, or practically never, attend religious services, compared to 42% who said this in a 1982 survey. The latest findings are based on a Gallup poll conducted for The Daily Telegraph after the Lambeth Conference.

Little change, however, has come about in the percentage who attend frequently — that is once a week or more than once a week.The latest national figure is 14%, while the 1982 figure is 13%.

In the current survey, 40% of Catholics and 9% of Anglicans attended at least once a week.

There were both age and sex differences in churchgoing habits. Whereas 11% of men, for example, said that they went once a week or more often, the figure rose to 17% among women.

Similarly, while 8% of young adults attended at least every week, 25% of senior citizens did so.

The latest results and trend:

Apart from weddings, funerals and baptisms, about how often do you attend religious services these days?

	Today	March 1982
	%	%
More than once a week	3	4
Once a week	11	9
Once a month	7	12
Christmas, Easter	5	7
Other holy days	3	4
Once a year	5	9
Less often	10	13
(Practically) never	56	42

This latest Gallup Poll was conducted from August 10 to 15 among a nationally representative quota sample of 1,021 British adults, interviewed face-to-face in more than 100 districts across Great Britain.

Three Out Of Four British Anglicans Back Women Priests

The election of a woman as a bishop in the United States, which has sparked a controversy in the Anglican Communion, comes at a time when three in four British Anglicans say the Church of England should accept women as priests, including bishops.

In a British Gallup survey conducted for The Daily Telegraph after the Lambeth Conference, 70% said women should be accepted as priests, including bishops, 18% said should not, while 12% were undecided.

This is in contrast to a distinct swing against the idea in the July General Synod, particularly among the bishops.

Most churched in the Communion's 164 countries have not yet decided whether they are in favor of women priests and Anglican bishops. Some have rejected the idea, while churches in Brazil, Canada, New Zealand, the United States, and Hong Kong have already ordained women priests.

Barbara Harris, a 58-year-old divorcee, is likely to become the first woman bishop in the 70 million-member Anglican Communion after being elected recently to become the next suffragan bishop of Massachusetts. She must still be consecrated, a process which could take up to five months.

Third of Americans Have Had Powerful Religious Awakening

One-third of Americans have had what could be described as a "religious experience" — a particularly powerful religious insight or awakening, according to a recent national survey on "The Unchurched American." This is roughly the same proportion as recorded in eight earlier surveys going back to 1976, in which similar questions were asked.

The "religious experience" is one of the least explored, yet one of the most fascinating aspects of the spiritual life of Americans, sometimes described as an otherworldly feeling of union with God or a universal spirit. William James made one of the earliest attempts to study this phenomenon in his classic work, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, published in 1902. Now, by means of national scientific surveys, it is possible to take a more systematic approach to this aspect of religion.

The Gallup Poll first explored this topic in 1962, one of the earliest national surveys on this topic. In that survey, 20% said they had had a religious experience. The next Gallup survey on this topic was conducted in 1976 and found 31% reporting a religious experience. Later Gallup surveys have recorded similar results, with the percentages ranging between 30% and 38%. Some of the differences in the percentages may be due to wording variations.

Many who have a religious experience are able to recreate details, even the exact date of the occurrence.

Such an experience often appears to have a profound effect on the outlook and direction of a person's life. Many recount experiences at the time of crises, others in answer to prayers. Survey evidence also reveals that these experiences are more often gradual than sudden.

One of the most interesting aspects of these phenomena is that they happen to the non-churched and the non-religious as well as to persons who attend church regularly or who say religion plays an important role in their lives.

These experiences tend to fall into the following six general categories:

1. An "other-worldly" feeling of union with a Divine Being, carrying with it the conviction of the forgiveness of sins and salvation.
2. Dramatic spiritual awakening related to nature (sunset, stars, the universe, life itself, etc.)
3. Experiences related to healing.
4. Experiences involving visions, voices and dreams.
5. A sudden insight and turning to God in a moment of crisis (death or near-death, war, car accident, etc.).
6. Unable to describe experience.

The following question was asked of a representative sample of U.S. adults in a national survey conducted by The Gallup Organization in March for Congress '88: A National Festival of Evangelism:

Would you say that you have ever had a religious or mystical experience, that is, a moment of sudden religious insight or awakening?

The result: 33% answer in the affirmative.

Here are the questions asked in earlier surveys and the national findings (with the title of the survey or name of sponsor):

1985 (Reader's Digest): *Have you ever had what you consider to be an important religious experience or revelation that reinforced your faith?* YES — 38%

1983 (Survey on "Electronic Church"): Same as 1988 question. YES — 37%

1982 (Schuller survey on self-esteem): *Have you ever had a religious experience — that is, a particularly powerful insight or awakening that changed the direction of your life, or not?* YES — 34%

1981 (Gallup International survey on values): Same as 1982 question. YES — 34%

1980 (Survey on life after death): Same as 1982 question. YES — 30%

1978 (Unchurched American): Same as 1988 question. YES — 35%

1978 (Christianity Today): Same as 1982 question. YES — 34%

1978 (Christianity Today): Asked of those who had such an experience — *Was this a sudden experience or a more gradual one?* SUDDEN — 40%, MORE GRADUAL — 59%, DON'T KNOW — 1%

1976 (Gallup Poll): *Would you say that you have ever had a religious or mystical experience — that is, a moment of sudden religious insight or awakening?* YES — 31%

1962 (Gallup Poll): *Would you say that you have ever had a religious or mystic experience — that is, a moment of sudden religious insight or awakening?* YES — 20%

How To Reach The Unchurched American

Millions of Americans remain unchurched, and many churches are continuing to experience losses in membership. What can be done to reach the unchurched American? How can present members be kept in the fold?

New light is shed on these pressing questions by the results of a just-completed major survey of the nation's adults, THE UNCHURCHED AMERICAN — 1988. The focus of this survey is on the factors that cause people to leave the church — and those that cause them to return.

This survey, which reports updates of many of the questions asked in the landmark survey of a decade ago (THE UNCHURCHED AMERICAN, 1978), compares and contrasts the attitudes of the churched and unchurched on social changes, lifestyle factors, basic religious beliefs and many other factors that are related to churchlessness.

Special attention in this 1988 survey has been given to the religious experience and needs of blacks and Hispanics in the United States.

The report, based on this important survey, provides full statistical details, comparisons with 1978 results, as well as a special section which offers practical steps to reach the unchurched in your community.

For good, solid, practical information that can help YOU in YOUR ministry — both in reaching new people and in deepening the commitment of the present members of your church — write for the new report, THE UNCHURCHED AMERICAN — 1988.

To place your order write: The Princeton Religion Research Center, P.O. Box 628, Princeton, NJ 08542. Cost per copy is $29.00.

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